

Great Mystery of Godliness

Dec 23, 2018 ~ 1 Timothy 3.16

16a ~ "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness"

- The word "controversy" here confused me at first
 - The 6 upcoming statements are very controversial
- Let me paraphrase this sentence for greater clarity
 - "And without a doubt great is the mystery of godliness" / -or- **dispute**
- Paul is merely confirming the astounding nature of the 6 statements
 - He's admitting that people have a right to be astounded by them

Complexity of a Single Verse (Verses differ in complexity and significance)

- **KJV**: 66 books of Bible / 1189 chapters / 31k verses / 770k words
 - 18 chapters per book / 26 verses per chapter / 25 words per verse
- **III**: If all 31k verses were on dartboard – this among most complex (35 words)
- Robert Estienne did great service to Church in 1551 by creating verses
 - And for publishing Calvin's Institutes while living in Geneva

16a ~ "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness"

- The word "mystery" occurs 22 times in NT / Yet nearly all reveal it
 - **Mk 4.11** ~ "To you it has been given to know the m of the kingdom"
 - **Rom 11.25** ~ "I do not desire brethren that you should be ignorant of this m"
 - **Rom 16.25** ~ ".. revelation of the m kept secret since the world began"
 - **Eph 1.9** ~ "having made known to us the m of His will"
 - **Col 2.2** ~ ".. attaining to .. the knowledge of the m of God"
- In pagan religions and Christian cults mystery is revealed to the privileged few
 - To Joseph Smith alone were supposedly revealed "**the keys of the mysteries and the revelations**" in connection with the Melchizedek Priesthood – saving ordinance
- A significant aspect of the "**mystery of Christianity**" is its egalitarian nature
 - Judaism maintained rigid discipline of religious practices / Temple access
 - Solomon's – 3 parts – Outer Court, Inner Court, Temple (HoH)
 - Herod's – Court of the Gentiles, C of the Women, C of the Israelites, C of the Priests, Temple
 - Bulk of all of this done away with in Christianity
 - Rituals and practices are far fewer and much simpler these days

16a ~ "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness"

- "godliness" can also be rendered "**devotion**", or "**true religion**"

Xition: Introduction to the 6 statements . . .

Hand Gestures for the 6 Statements

- God was: (*hand gestures*) h
- 1. Manifested in the flesh e (*up then grasping chest*)
- 2. Justified in the Spirit h (*out to sides of head*)
- 3. Seen by angels h (*binoculars around eyes*)
- 4. Preached among the Gentiles e (*megaphone around mouth*)
- 5. Believed on in the world e (*fingers on skull / brain*)
- 6. Received up in glory h (*hands extended raised to heaven*)
- Note xitions – heavenly -> earthly -> heavenly -> earthly -> heavenly

Seeking a Chronology

- The 6 statements Paul makes can be viewed as a chronological progression
 - It is perhaps even natural for us to do so / It appears so . . .
 - But it can be difficult to fit them into a single timeline
 - e.g., "How can #6 be Ascension when in #4 He's preached among Gentiles?"
- What makes more sense is that each is more than a step / they're ongoing
 - Jesus was manifested in the flesh repeatedly over 33 years of life
 - Jesus was justified by the Spirit during life and at death
 - Jesus was heralded by angels, ministered to by angels, welcomed by them

One More Point

- "God" in NKJV appears as "He" or "Who" in NIV/ESV
 - Many make much of this / But we know Jesus is the subject here

1 – 16b ~ "manifested in the flesh"

- Using the word "manifested" presumes pre-existence
 - What already existed is now appearing in the flesh
 - What was invisible to the eye is now visible to the eye
- Jesus said in **John 17.4-5** ~ "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵ And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."
- Jesus refers to His existence and glory prior to creation (1 & 6)

16b ~ "manifested in the flesh"

- Paul said in **Rom 8.2-3** ~ "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . ."
 - Cults make much of "likeness" – "But to what does likeness refer?"
 - The word doesn't refer to "flesh" as they assert – but to "sinful"

- Another beautiful explicit reference to Christ in flesh is in **John 1.14** ~ "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."
- Perhaps most beautiful **Lk 2.1-16** ~ "And it came to pass .. lying in a manger"
- Jesus' manifestation in flesh began with promise, to His ascension and beyond

Jesus Enfleshed

- Jesus became flesh for us – and though God – He remains a Man for us
- God exists apart from time, yet in time, Jesus will remain with us in the flesh
- The 2nd Person of the Trinity has forever enfleshed Himself as the God-man
- But the primary emphasis of this text is upon Christ's earthly ministry

2 – 16c ~ "justified in the Spirit"

- There's debate over whether the "s" of Spirit should be capitalized
 - "Does this refer to the human spirit of Jesus or the Holy Spirit?"
- If this refers to the Holy Spirit emphasis is upon HS's role in Christ's ministry
- If Jesus' own spirit it emphasizes His innocence and right to rise from dead
 - i.e., He must be innocent if he's allowed to rise from the grave

16c ~ "justified in the Spirit"

- To be justified is to be declared righteous
- Regardless of which "Spirit" is intended clause has same meaning
 1. Christ was hated and despised, and executed as a criminal
 2. He endured this penalty on our behalf / the truly guilty ones
 3. He rose and lives because He suffered this execution unjustly
 4. We live because He suffered this execution unjustly on our behalf

Remember – Jesus was Innocent and Unworthy of Death

- That Jesus rose from the grave to eternal life is proof of His innocence
- God metes out true justice and will correct the injustices people suffer
- On earth Jesus suffered a wrongful death because of a kangaroo court
- **Def:** kangaroo court ~ "a court held by a legitimate judicial authority who intentionally disregards the court's legal or ethical obligations."

3 – 16d ~ "seen by angels"

- The word for "angel" and "messenger" is the same one – "angelos"
- Some interpreters regard this as referring to humans – not angels
 - But the vast majority take it as referring to angelic beings
 - Until the birth of Christ, angels had never seen God

Xition: But that changed for them . . .

16d ~ "seen by angels"

- Jesus and angels had appeared in human form at times in the Old Testament
 - But in these appearances they "took on" human forms
 - They put on flesh as if it were a cloak
 - They didn't truly become men – they simply impersonated them
- The angels ministering to Jesus must have been amazed
 - Angels knew how unusual this was – Apostles did not
 - III: King as beggar – Servants (*aka angels*) seeing them is a shock
 - The fallen angels must have been disgusted – amused
 - III: Michal saw David dancing ~ "she despised him in her heart"

4 – 16e ~ "preached among the Gentiles"

- The prior 2 sections regarded the heavenly realm
 - Jesus was "justified in the Spirit" and "seen by angels"
- Now we descend to the unwashed masses of earth – the Gentiles
 - Jesus ministered to the Jews, yet . . .
 - Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman – 5 husbands – now living in sin
 - His Apostles were amazed that He would do this – Did He not know?
 - Oh, He knew, and it isn't that He didn't care – He cared very much . . .
- Jewish leaders accused Jesus of consorting with tax collectors & sinners
 - Worse than the Romans as they were Jews complicit with them
- The Apostles reach out to the Romans and Greeks
 - Rome: Picture the martial pride, the cruelty, and the idolatry
 - Greece: The intellectual pride, rampant immorality, and idolatry

16e ~ "preached among the Gentiles"

- Jesus didn't just consort with them / He preached to them
- Condescension exhibited by Jesus in becoming a Man paralleled in Judaism
 - Precious texts are being shared with uncircumcised Romans and Greeks

5 – 16f ~ "believed on in the world"

- And not only was the gospel preached it was believed
- God awakened peoples of all nations to their sin and their need of forgiveness
- They'd always had this need, but now God opened the door to satisfying it

16f ~ "believed on in the world"

- In Colossians Paul says the gospel has gone out to all the world
 - **Read Col 1.5b-6a** ~ "you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as it has also in all the world .."

Xition: "What did the Jewish leaders think about this?"

The Jewish Leaders Were Enraged

- This cult based on this false Messiah grew so big – so fast
- Jews were a province of Roman Empire – yet influential
- Jewish leaders feared the loss of this power and killed Jesus to protect it
- Yet killing Him only fueled the passion of the unwashed masses for Him
- Jews attacked Christianity with such ferocity that God stepped in to save it
 - **Mat 24.21-22** ~ “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²² And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.”

16f ~ "believed on in the world"

- This little preposition “in” is very important
- Roman Catholics would have you believe in “purgatory”
 - **def:** “A place and time between life and death where faith can grow”
 - **Heb 9.27** says ~ “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”
- **Joel 3.14** says ~ “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”
 - Now is the time of decision...!
 - Every human heart has a fixed number of beats
 - Every human will one day breath their last
 - **III:** Whooping cough ~ Lungs screaming for air
- “Man has learned much of human physiology ~ But if he hasn’t yet learned that his life rests in the palm of God’s hand – he’s learned nothing . . .”

6 – 16g ~ “received up in glory”

- To protect a chronology some theologians say this doesn’t refer to Ascension
 - But clearly it does – **Read Acts 1.7-11** ~ “And He said .. go into Heaven”
 - I don’t know much about angels, but I believe they have a sense of humor
 - I can just see them delivering this statement in a matter-of-fact voice
- This need not only be Ascension – During the Transfiguration He was in glory
- Glimpses into His glory occurred – Like in Garden when He said “I am He”

Excerpts from “**The Mind of the Master**” – by John Watson

- Speaking of Jesus - “You are never amazed, one day by His greatness, the next by His littleness. You are ever amazed that He is incomparably better than you could have expected. He is tender without being weak, strong without being coarse, lowly without being servile. He has conviction without intolerance, enthusiasm without fanaticism, holiness without Pharisaism, passion without prejudice.”

- “He abounded in prayer, but in His prayers there was no contrition, no confession, no cry for pardon. .. No word of self-condemnation ever passed His lips, no lamentation over indwelling corruption, no sigh for a closer walk with God. It was not that He closed His eyes to the presence of sin or made light of its guilt. .. No soul has ever been so sensitive as His to the taint of impurity; no heart has ever been so oppressed by the burden of the world’s guilt. His presence was a rebuke and an inspiration .. His spotless life is a revelation at once of the beauty of holiness and of the hideousness of sin.”

“How Do We See Jesus?”

- At Christmas we present Jesus as the “**babe in the manger**” of **Luke 2**
- At Easter we focus on His death, burial, and resurrection
- But throughout the rest of the year, how ought we focus on Jesus?
- I believe the answer is in **Revelation**
- **Read Revelation 5.4-5, 11-14** ~ “So I wept much .. forever and ever.”

Jesus is the Lion of Judah

Jesus is the Lamb of Calvary

Jesus is and Always Will be the Lion and the Lamb

Jude 24-25 ~ "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen."

Great Mystery of Godliness - Handout

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1. What is an alternative to the word *controversy* in our text?
2. What is it that Robert Estienne did in 1551?
3. In what way was the *mystery* to which our text refers revealed?
4. Connect the phrases in our text to their hand gestures

Manifested in the flesh	Hands extended to sides of head
Justified in the Spirit	Hands grasping chest
Seen by angels	Hands raised to heaven
Preached among the Gentiles	Binoculars around eyes
Believed on in the world	Fingers on head
Received up in glory	Megaphone around mouth

5. The word *manifested* presumes what about the subject?
6. In what Bible book is the phrase "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*"?
7. What does it mean that Jesus was *justified*?
8. How was the condescension of Jesus becoming a man paralleled in Judaism?
9. What book of the Bible refers to the gospel being preached to the entire world?
10. Give an example of Jesus' glory being revealed before His Ascension?